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ABSTRACT

Social control in school situations is a restrictive and constraining process that can take both overt and covert forms. Examples of both overt and unobtrusive control mechanisms include such things as study halls, student council, elementary school door guards, and substitute teachers. The recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance is one ritual of social control that has complex meaning and affect upon students. Forty-five children from several different elementary schools, when asked if they said the Pledge in class, how they felt about it, and what they considered the most important part of the Pledge, responded differently according to grade level. For primary level children it serves as a day-beginning ritual and gives the child an opportunity to excel, thereby gaining personal satisfaction, teacher and peer approval. For third and fourth graders it serves as a means of patriotic expression. In contrast, fifth and sixth graders reveal more apathy and derision for the ritual. Although some patriotic reasons continue, many mentioned participating because they view it as part of the school day or because their teacher insists upon it. Thus the Pledge is a convenient way to settle students down and instill social control through patriotic ritual. (Author/DE)

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SCHOOLING, THE PLEDGE PHENOMENON AND SOCIAL CONTROL*

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This paper is an attempt to clarify the social control function within the educational process. To understand control mechanisms at work in the school, social control and the socialization process will be defined and compared. Data gathered through participant observation field studies are used to amplify an understanding of social control and to display the multi-control function of certain school practices. In addition, the implications of social control within school settings are examined and questions raised concerning the validity of such practices functioning in a learning institution.

SOCIAL CONTROL AND SOCIALIZATION

A number of social scientists have attempted to define or bring new theoretical understanding to social control. These efforts fall within the confines of what Sites (1973) refers to as "control theory." The pioneering attempt by Ross (1901) saw social control as a purposeful and deliberate domination by society. One function was assimilation into the larger society by weakening the individual away from the values of his minority or ethnic group. Though this notion may seem, in light of our contemporary return to our ethnic and cultural origins, as repressive, Ross saw social control as a facilitator of progress.

LaPiere (1954) interprets social control as mediating between a specific occasion in which the individual acts and how he expresses his personality while acting. The individual desires social status and conforms to the pressures brought to bear upon his actions by the group. Sites (1973) in effect is in agreement with this point of view, and expounds upon a theory of needs to explain social control. However he sees these needs as beyond and outside of society.

A different approach to social control is presented by Katz (1968) in focusing upon autonomy. He sees autonomy as a component within any societal or organizational structure. The degree of autonomy for each individual differs with role, and changes when he shifts from one group to another.

This paper does not concentrate on autonomy in moving toward a definition of social control within the educational institution. Instead, we suggest a simplistic definition easily understood by the social scientist and lay person alike. Social control in school situations is seen as a restrictive and constraining process. It focuses on the meaning of control, which implies restraint and confinement rather than any kind of autonomous action. It is, as Rose (1971) puts it, "the pressure that men can bring to bear on their fellows to bring them in line with social expectations." Social control, then, is in the school context influence, pressure, an act upon the student, rather than a focus upon the opposite as in the model suggested by Katz.

Socialization differs from social control because in the educational institution it is a holistic process while control is but one component of that process. Simply stated, socialization is learning how to become a member of a group. Havighurst and Newgarten (1967) suggest that the process involves learning all of the taboos and acts considered desirable by the group, internalizing the group's way of life, their way of doing things.

We amplify upon this definition by suggesting that there is a dual component within socialization in the school setting. Socialization can encompass both constraint and freedom. Freedom because the very

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nature of American schools as learning institutions should be to encourage individual exploration of ideas, the questioning of societal values and norms, and the enhancement of creativity. All of these and other freedoms fall within the socialization function of American schools; however, they are not present within a social control model.

CONTROL AND ITS APPLICATION

Social control may be applied both overtly and unobtrusively. When it is overtly applied, it is often deliberate and obvious to both the controller and controlled. Unobtrusive social control may or may not be deliberate on the part of the controller, in this case the teacher, and usually the controlled are unaware of constraint. A good example of overt control is the study hall which has not changed dramatically since Waller (1932) first described it. The only thing that seems to have changed is that there are no ink wells to throw around the room. In one contemporary study hall visited in 1973, approximately 160 students were "studying" at tables of four each. The teacher in charge was nicknamed "The Beast" by students. For any infraction of the rules concerning "no talking, no throwing, and no shuffling of feet, hands, or body," he dispensed punishment. This consisted of various sentences "on the wall." Students were told to stand with their nose against the wall while holding their books behind their back for a period from five minutes to one full class period. Each time the books were dropped the sentence was increased by five minutes. When interviewed, the teacher in charge stated that the punishment might be harsh but few pencils were thrown across the room once students became aware "that I mean business." This,

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then, is an example of overt control recognizable both by students and teacher.

An example of unobtrusive social control can be seen in the conduct and functioning of a high school student council. Student councils are typically encouraged by educators because they supposedly give students some responsibility within the decision making process and serve as a training ground for democratic citizenship. In reality, student governments are usually powerless and have no voice in the decision making process. The following sequence of events at one high school illustrates the benign impact upon decision making by a student council:

The proposal for a student center at North High has been a main topic for two years.

1971-72	
Student Council proposes a student center	North High Administration denies the proposal.
Summer 1972	
A Student, Parent, Teacher Task Force proposes a Student Center.	North High Administration agrees to consider the proposal.
1972-73	
The Student Government proproposes a student center.	A Vice-Principal agrees to the proposal.
The Student Government has the plans drawn up.	The Vice-Principal approves the plans.
Meeting called to present plans to the Head of Construction, City Public Schools.	Meeting cancelled.
The Student Government sends out petitions to be signed by students and faculty.	Over 700 students and twenty faculty members sign petitions.
Plans, petitions and letter signed by all three administrators sent to the Assistant Superintendent.	The Assistant Superintendent does not respond.

As one student says, "That's a dead end!"

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Another proposal made by the Student Government is for a Spring Festival to be held in April or May:

> The Student Government comes up with the idea and takes the idea to the Vice-Principal.
> The Vice-Principal agrees and takes the proposal to the Principal.
> The Principal agrees, but doubts that a date can be arranged.
> Vice-Principal tells the Student Government it must find an empty date on the activity calendar.
> The Student Government finds what it believes to be empty dates and submits them to the Vice-Principal.
> All dates are said to be unsatisfactory.

Though some high school students may actually believe that they do have some power through student government, apathy and pessimism are the overriding feelings exhibited by many students elected to office. Such was the case in the following discussion by junior class representatives:

> "Let's have an assembly."
> "What?"
> "An assembly! The constitution says we can have one every month."
> "What about?"
> "Oh ... I don't know. I guess we could tell them what we've been doing."
> "What have we been doing?"
> "Nothing."
> "But we should have one. It's up to us to inform our class."
> "There's nothing to tell them."
> "No one cares anyway."

Unobtrusive control is apparently as powerful as overt and creates negative feelings on the part of the controlled.

MULTIPLE CONTROL FUNCTIONS

Each social control mechanism may have a number of purposes or functions. These purposes may have an immediate or delayed effect upon

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the student and the functions themselves may or may not be observable at the time the control mechanism is employed. This multi-function element of social control can be illustrated by referring to the two examples cited above. The students in "The Beast's" study hall probably have negative attitudes concerning study hall and their teacher while they are there. What must be understood is that their future attitudes concerning study, schools, teachers, and discipline are affected by the controls employed in that study hall. It is obvious that some of those attitudes are not desirable. In the Student Government example, it is not difficult to understand the apathy of future citizens toward another Watergate if their experience with representative government has been negative. It is apparent that the retentive learnings from both of these examples could be negative and directly in opposition to what the schools say they want to teach (e.g., teaching students how to study, participate in government, be good citizens, enjoy learning, etc.). When employing social control mechanisms, it is imperative that school officials look at the future implications of such techniques.

Some additional examples of the multi-control function can be seen in the role of the substitute and the utilization of student door guards at an elementary school. The guards learn their role by observing the behavior of other guards when they are in the early grades. In addition, they learn part of the authority role from controlling mechanisms used by teachers. Guards at one school that was visited had a very authoritative approach to their duties. Door guards were seen shouting at the students to quiet down before they would admit them to the building. On several rainy days the door patrol was observed actually

refusing admittance to the school because they had been given no orders. Again we see that the leadership role may well be perceived as repressive and controlling in some future situation.

In the case of the substitute teacher, though there may be lip service paid by the administration to learning and the teaching assignment, any experienced substitute knows that he is brought in primarily to play a lion-taming role or to control. His professional competence as a substitute is judged on the basis of how quiet and how much control he can maintain. The substitute with discipline problems is not invited back to the school for a second chance. Substitutes as a group are often the most repressive adults students meet in school. What attitudes students learn from such constraint is difficult to gauge. It is fairly certain, however, that they do make life miserable for each succeeding substitute teacher they come in contact with, and they receive similar treatment in return.

In the next portion of this paper we examine in depth one apparently simple school ritual, the recitation of the pledge to the flag. Our investigation indicates that the ritual has a much more complex meaning and affect upon students than one might imagine.

THE PLEDGE PHENOMENON

The scene is repeated with unswerving precision in countless classrooms across the country every morning. A bell rings and thirty automatons jump out of their seats, thirty right hands are pressed against thirty hearts, and thirty mouths begin chanting in unbroken unison. How many of the thirty minds know what the mouths are saying

is highly speculative; the important thing is that they're "doing it." In a mere sixty seconds, thirty squabbling children have been transformed into dutiful citizens and the day can begin.

Certainly this early morning ritual has as much significance as any other event in the classroom. Perhaps school should be redefined as the three R's and the PA, because the Pledge of Allegiance serves vital functions in the daily routine. Reading groups may be rescheduled, arithmetic may be preempted by a field trip, writing may be skipped, but who ever heard of saying the Pledge in mid-afternoon? This truly is the Pledge phenomenon.

The Pledge's significance became apparent one day when Susie, a kindergarten student, was retelling the day's events in her classroom. She mentioned that she thought the group had forgotten to say the Pledge that day. She thought a moment and then corrected herself, saying that, yes, they had remembered. Her mother said she was glad about that because one day Susie had come home in tears bemoaning the fact that they had indeed forgotten the Pledge. Susie was upset the rest of the day. This crisis had deeply affected one child. How do other children feel about this daily, and outwardly perfunctory, ritual?

A total of forty-five children from several different elementary schools were interviewed in order to ascertain their feelings about the importance of the Pledge and its meaning to them. Informants ranged in age from kindergarten through the sixth grade, and represented a variety of racial and ethnic groups. They were asked if they said the Pledge in class, how they felt about it, and what they considered the most important part of the Pledge. Their responses revealed an assortment of feelings

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about this ritual and their individual perceptions of its meaning.

Nearly all of the children questioned reported that the Pledge was an integral part of their school day. Their feelings about its inclusion in the school program ran from unabashed enthusiasm in the lower grades to apathy and derision among the older children. Disparities in feelings were so great throughout the grade levels that it was necessary to deal separately with three age divisions in analyzing the comments.

The Primary Grades

Three major themes were most noticeable in the remarks of the youngest students, those in the kindergarten, first and second grades. The natural ebullience of these children coupled with their apparently complete candor provided the clearest glimpse into their perceptions of the Pledge.

The first of these themes characterized the Pledge's meaning as a day-beginning ritual. The following comments show how important it is in the series of events that make up school:

Kdg. pupil: "We do it every day. I know the minute the bell rings I should pop up and find my heart."

1st grader: "We do it every day to get ready for school. It means school's ready to start."

1st grader: "Yes, we do it every day so we know it's time to stop playing and get started with school. It means quit fooling around and look at the flag."

2nd grader: "The Pledge is the first thing -- well really the second after putting your coat away."

2nd grader: "I love to say it. It means that right after the teacher takes our milk money and I can help count it."

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2nd grader: "The most important part of the Pledge is Friday cause after that we always have Show-and-Tell.

For some children the ritual takes on an almost superstitious quality: as a kindergartner said, "When we forget it means a bad day at school."

A second major theme emerged from the many children who regarded the Pledge recitation as an opportunity for individual achievement. Just as a child gets great satisfaction from excelling in math or being a leader in sports, so he views the Pledge as another chance to be outstanding at something:

Kdg. pupil: "I like it cause sometimes I'm the leader. You yell at the kids if they don't look at the flag."

Kdg. pupil: "I like to say it real loud. It means you get to be the leader and help everyone find where their heart is and put their hand on it."

Kdg. pupil: "The most important part is ... being the leader and trying to be the fastest one to get up."

Kdg. pupil: "I'm a good pledger. I know all the words. I can say 'em as fast as my teacher."

1st grader: "I stand straighter than any other kid."

1st grader: "I only call it fun if I'm the leader. You get to boss everybody, even the Rockets ... the kids that think they read the best."

2nd grader: "I like it because I know all the words now."

The <u>way</u> the Pledge is said is often more important than <u>what</u> is said. The entire procedure has been carefully prescribed for the children and most of them take great pains to perform flawlessly:

Kdg. pupil: "The Pledge is when you hold your heart, and say the poem. All the people look at the flag. It's a hard poem so the teacher says it real slow."

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Kdg. pupil: "I don't know what it means, but if you don't get up quick the teacher yells."

Kdg. pupil: "You're supposed to keep your hands to yourself and if you're holding your heart you can't fight with someone else."

Kdg. pupil: "You have to look straight up at the flag or it doesn't count ... because you know the rule - no flag, no Pledge."

1st grader: "You got to know which hand to use or you're not really pledging."

1st grader: "Well, you got to look the right way, you got to hold your heart, and you got to be at the same place as the leader."

1st grader: "The Pledge is like a song but you don't sing it - you say it all in the same voice."

2nd grader: "The most important part is putting your hand in the right place and standing straight."

2nd grader: "Every part is important cause if you leave a part out you don't have a Pledge."

One child showed a willingness to forego personal satisfaction for the sake of the group's performance: "You shouldn't try to be the first one done -- we say it all together."

The third basic theme emerging from the younger children concerned the meaning of the Pledge's words. They approached this problem in one of two ways. Some children knew the Pledge had something to do with their country and connected it with other symbols with which they were familiar (the flag, the President) or terms they had heard (citizen, American).

Kdg. pupil: "You have to do it or you're not an American... someone that lives around here."

Kdg. pupil: "Means we think our country's the best." (When asked the name of our country, she replied, 'Omaha')

1st grader: "I really don't know why we say it but maybe it's because of all the dead Presidents."

1st grader: "We have to do it every day or the President might think we don't like our country."

1st grader: "We think the flag is pretty. Want to see me make some stars?"

1st grader: "It's like a magic song and only good citizens can say those words."

1st grader: "A good citizen's a kid that looks right at the flag."

2nd grader: "It means we love our country or Nebraska."

2nd grader: "I think it means you have to love our country. If you don't say it you're a bad citizen and might have to go to Russia. I don't know where it is but I don't think they like kids there very much."

A second approach to the meaning problem was used by children who found a familiar word in the Pledge and built their interpretations around that word. Most noticeable was the mention of God, thus the Pledge had a prayer-like quality for some children:

Kdg. pupil: "It means to help God to love us."

Kdg. pupil: "The most important part is ... talking about God."

1st grader: "We better be good cause God is watching us even if He is invisible."

1st grader: "I think it's about God. He's glad to see you went to school."

Some children could not explain the Pledge's meaning in any terms and admitted it:

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Kdg. pupil: "I don't think the words mean much."

1st grader: "I don't know .. I never heard some of them words before."

1st grader: "I don't know what all the words mean .. I think we learn them in second."

2nd grader: "I don't know but I think about it a lot."

Thus, the Pledge has some important functions for the primary level child. It serves as a day-beginning ritual and gives the child an opportunity to excel in one aspect of school, thereby gaining personal satisfaction and perhaps teacher and peer approval. The meaning of the Pledge is not important at this stage. Children enjoy singing "Frere Jacques" in French as much as in the English version. The words really didn't matter, the rhythm and group participation is meaningful. Similarly, the words of the Pledge are subordinate to standing correctly, making sure one has his right hand over his heart, and the power of taking a turn as leader.

The Middle Grades

A quite different picture emerged from the comments of third and fourth grade children. Their remarks were overwhelmingly geared toward the patriotic aspect of the daily recitation. The functions of the Pledge so crucial to the younger children were seldom mentioned by students in this age group. Instead, they exhibited a fierce loyalty to the Pledge as proof of their "citizenship." Words such as "duty," "honor," "respect," and "liberty" were used freely, and the users had definite ideas as to what these concepts meant. There were also a great many references to the

President. Apparently the man in that office is a most tangible symbol of identification as an American.

This overt patriotism perhaps can be explained at least in part by the influence of Scouting on these students. Several mentioned their involvement in Cub Scouts or Brownies, and many of the responses sounded like paraphrases of the Scout laws. In any case, the question of why the Pledge is said elicited such super-patriotic responses as the following:

3rd grader: "It's the nice thing to do for our country. Abraham Lincoln and George Washington wanted us to do it and their birthdays are coming."

3rd grader: "Because we have a good President and he wants us to."

3rd grader: "Because we live in the United States - no place else has a Pledge."

3rd grader: "You say it to respect the flag."

4th grader: "Everybody does the Pledge every day in my room cause we're Americans you know."

4th grader: "We say the Pledge every day to honor our country."

4th grader: "It's very important because we have to be good citizens. That's a guy who honors our country and the flag."

4th grader: "It's part of being an American - you know we have to respect the flag."

When asked what the Pledge actually meant, the students again dug into their sacks of patriotic concepts and defined these abstract ideas in terms relevant to them:

3rd grader: "It means you're a citizen - someone that acts right."

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3rd grader: "It means we love our country and won't let anybody say bad things about it."

3rd grader: "It means we're good citizens and obey all the laws and know the name of the President."

3rd grader: "You're a good citizen and you do your duty to your country."

4th grader: "We love our country and President Nixon and the flag is important because it's the one that means America."

4th grader: "We love the United States and would fight for it."

4th grader: "We live in a free country and we're happy about it." (When asked to define 'free' the child replied, "You can vote for President Nixon anytime you want and you can leave if you want.")

Patriotism was further expressed on the "Archie Bunker" level by a fourth grader who stated, "You love America and you're a Republican like me ... like President Nixon, not a pinko Commie."

When asked to pinpoint the most important part of the Pledge, some children again stressed patriotic values although the ritualistic features described by the primary students were echoed by a few:

3rd grader: "About the flag -- you should know it has fifty stars and thirteen stripes." (When asked why that number the child replied, "Well, we have fifty states and thirteen was George Washington's lucky number.")

3rd grader: "I don't know but I think all of it's important or we wouldn't have to do it all."

4th grader: "I pledge allegiance cause it means you're getting ready to honor the flag."

4th grader: " 'Liberty for all' -- we have it but Russia doesn't."

4th grader: "When we say 'United States of America' cause that's the first and last name of our country."

4th grader: "One nation -- that means there's no other place like the United States."

4th grader: "I think 'liberty and justice for all'. I'm not too sure what it means but you should finish up with "My Country Tis of Thee'."

And from the Archie Bunker patriot, "I like the part about the Republicans. They don't say anything about the dirty Democrats." When asked what he meant by this statement, he quoted the phrase " ... and to the Republicans for which it stands ..."

The Upper Grades

In contrast to the enthusiasm of primary children and the fierce patriotism of the middle grades, students in the fifth and sixth grades revealed another attitude toward the Pledge which can be characterized somewhere between apathy and derision. Some of the patriotic cliches still appeared in their comments, accompanied by a greater understanding of the meaning of the more abstract concepts. This was especially true of children who alluded to their involvement in Scouting. However, several students expressed rebellion at having to recite the Pledge. Younger children mentioned participating because it was part of the school day or out of deference to some higher authority such as the President. These older children were more practical -- they did it because a very real authority figure, their teacher, insisted.

Most of the patriotic statements emanated from the fifth graders. Especially interesting were references to current events showing that these children were able to relate real happenings to abstract ideas:

5th grader: "It's about the only thing kids can do for their country. It shows the President we think America is A-OK. It means we're Americans and that's the best country in the world."

5th grader: "It's our duty to our country. It means we're good citizens. We'll fight for our country like the POWs."

5th grader: "I like it cause it means I'm proud to be an American - a good citizen that loves our country like the POWs.

When asked to choose the most important part of the Pledge and define the terms they were using, these students had definite ideas on such concepts as freedom and liberty:

5th grader: "Liberty and justice for all -- it means we have a free country. That means we don't throw people in jail for nothing. You can say what you want but try not to hurt someone's feelings."

5th grader: "Liberty and justice for all -- the United States is a free country. You can read any book you want and say what you want."

5th grader: "I pledge allegiance because 'pledge' means you promise to do something and a Boy Scout always keeps every promise."

6th grader: "Liberty and justice for all -- that was in the Declaration of Independence. We have a free country and everybody is free - you're not a slave, you just have to follow the laws."

Apathy became noticeable even among boys and girls who expressed some patriotic thoughts:

6th grader: "I don't know if I'm glad we say it. I guess so -- it helps us learn about our country."

6th grader: "Sure we say it -- the teacher thinks it's cool -- I don't care. It means that we're all Americans but everybody already knows that."

6th grader: "It means a lot to citizens because we love our country. You know everybody just says it by heart and we don't think much about the words."

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6th grader: "We have to say it every day but it really doesn't matter that much. It means you have to respect the country and the flag and the teacher says we have to say it."

Outright derision replaced apathy for some of the students:

6th grader: "We're supposed to say it every day but you don't have to so I don't. I quit Boy Scouts 'cause all they did was carry around a bunch of flags. I don't say it -- I just don't let anybody catch me. My friends don't care about it either."

6th grader: "We say it. I don't really care. President Nixon stinks. Everybody knows he's a big liar. The Pledge means we've got a good country, but you shouldn't say it if the President stinks."

6th grader: "We have to do it but I don't care. It's a dumb thing they started in kindergarten and I guess every room has to do it. It's like singing and I hate that music class."

When asked why they participated, the rebels responded:

6th grader: "You have to or you get in trouble. I'm just glad to get it over with."

6th grader: "My teacher says it's the only time everybody is quiet -- you have to stand up and not mess around."

6th grader: "The teacher makes you or you get a detention."

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this study we conclude that the meaning of the Pledge phenomenon differs depending on grade level; however, it does appear to function as a form of social control. Teachers of elementary students find it convenient to have everyone say the Pledge and "stop messing around." The ritualistic and patriotic quality increases its value for social control. Even sixth graders with negative attitudes will, as is shown, keep quiet during the Pledge.

When asked about the purpose of the Pledge, most elementary teachers see its value in building patriotism and citizenship. The teacher that suggests that the ritual is a way of taking control of the class by demanding attention and unified effort is a rarity. Thus it would seem that many teachers are unaware of the Pledge as a control mechanism. However, we suggest that the way the Pledge is presently utilized, it is not much different from the military command of "Tench Hut." The selection of a member of the group as Pledge leader is strikingly similar to the role of platoon leader at the call for attention. Just as the soldier often has negative feelings about following orders, so do students. It should be noted that the retentive learnings or future attitudes concerning a control situation may well be negative. The attitudes of fifth and six graders toward the Pledge were found to be so. The Pledge also contains an unobtrusive quality. Few students or teachers recognize its function as a social control device.

Social control in schools, then, does not have to be the overt German example given by Richter (1972) of school youth during the Hitler era being chastized by their teacher for not wearing brown shirts; nor

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must it be as repressive as the physical roughing up given to a high school boy by the principal and superintendent as reported by Hollingshead (1949). Social control can be as innocent as the Pledge to the flag.

The Pledge, of course, is only one small part of the school day. We have briefly mentioned other observations concerning the social control function of study hall teachers, door guards, substitute teachers, and a high school student council. Evidently much of what occurs in school is repressive social control, or what Bowers (1974) refers to as the "covert curriculum."

We have attempted to raise some questions concerning the use of social control techniques in a learning environment. It would appear that many social control mechanisms are laden with negative values for students. Would it not be better if students recited the Pledge only after they were old enough to understand and appreciate the meaning? Could it not be used sparingly as an important societal rededication ritual? How would substitute teachers affect children if they really could guide the learning process? Is it not possible for study hall teachers to help students learn? Could students learn to internalize the democratic ethic and become participating citizens if they had a viable student government?

We believe that educators must re-evaluate what actually is taught in schools. Hopefully, they will learn to differentiate between a more humane, intellectually expansive socialization process and the repressive qualities of social control. For the purpose of school must be to free students so that they can learn rather than to promote a constraining environment that restricts growth.

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If educators do not begin to really examine what goes on in schools and dramatically delete social control mechanisms, then Henry's (1963) injunction remains: "There must therefore be more of the caveman than of the spaceman about our teachers."

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